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U.S. Senate.

Adress of Senator Reed Smoot, chairman  
Section of Forests, before the governors and  
national conservation commissions. 1898.



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ADDRESS OF HON. REED SMOOT.

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Mr. SUTHERLAND presented the following

ADDRESS OF SENATOR REED SMOOT, CHAIRMAN SECTION OF FORESTS, BEFORE THE GOVERNORS, STATE AND NATIONAL CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS, WASHINGTON, D. C., DECEMBER 10, 1908.

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DECEMBER 16, 1908.—Ordered to be printed.

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The CHAIRMAN. I have now the very great pleasure of presenting to you Senator Smoot, of Utah, chairman of the section of forests, who will present that part of the commission's report to you for your consideration.

Senator SMOOT. Mr. Chairman, governors, and members of the state and national conservation commissions, I take it that we are here this morning for the purpose of considering seriously the vital questions affecting the conservation and the proper utilization of the forests of our country. It is a subject greater than any man, greater than any State; it is as great as the nation itself. Every man, woman, and child of to-day, and every one yet to be born, is interested in this great question. You, no doubt, have noticed that in all the previous discussions of this conference the question of the conservation and the use of the forests has played an important part. In my remarks I do not intend to call special attention to any of the great resources of any particular State, because there is not a single governor here, or state representative, who could not sing the praises of his own State and speak of the wonders of its natural resources. I wish to present to you, and emphasize, if possible, some of the points that have been made in the report of the National Conservation Commission, which report I hope will be approved by this conference and then submitted to the President of the United States.

God has blessed this beautiful land of liberty most lavishly and richly; no country on earth has been given so many natural resources, and it seems to me that in the past we have been lax indeed in trying to preserve them, not only for ourselves, but for future posterity.

Gentlemen, yesterday you heard the report of the committee, wherein it was stated that an inventory of our forest resources had just been completed, which is the best we have ever possessed. This inventory is the result of the combined and vigorous effort of all state and federal agencies concerned.

The facts which flow from this great accumulation of knowledge regarding our forests will soon be made common knowledge, as they

ought to be. From these facts three great conclusions spring; the first, that the forest problem before the individual, the State, and the nation is grave and urgent; the second, that we can solve this problem if we act unitedly, vigorously, and at once; the third, that if we fail to act, the possibility of a satisfactory solution will be rendered doubtful or even wholly removed. The time is past for us to be content to dabble with the vital internal question which the right handling of our forests presents. It may well be our pride that no nation has a more wholesome and enthusiastic public sentiment for the right use of the forests than our own; but it may well be our shame that no nation takes poorer care of its private forests than our own country.

This is not the time for harsh criticism of the agencies which have brought about the deplorable condition of our forests. But above all it is the time for prompt, effective, and united effort to remedy this condition. The time has long passed when the only need for the conservation of our forests was in order that we might fulfill our duty to those who come after us. The time is already here when for our immediate welfare the conservation of all forests in private, as well as in public, hands is absolutely essential. Forestry no longer means its appeal to the American people solely through their sense of public duty. Its appeal now rests upon a firm foundation, not only of public duty, but of urgent industrial and commercial necessity.

I wish at this time to call your attention to some of the special items of that report again, so that you may each be impressed with the importance of this particular fact.

Consider the situation! This nation began with half its area under forest. To-day barely one-fourth of our country is covered by forest growth. Only one-fifth of the standing timber which remains is in public ownership, and therefore belongs to the people. Four-fifths of what remains is in private hands. Year by year we take more and more wood from our forests, and year by year, by careless cutting and by fire, we lower their capacity to produce again. The yearly production of our forests by growth is 7,000,000,000 cubic feet, a volume of timber so great that the mind can scarce comprehend it; but a volume of timber over three times as large is taken from our forests each year. Nor is this the complete indictment against us as a nation for our misuse of the forest. We invite by overtaxation the destructive handling of forest lands. We should plant, to protect farms from wind and to make stripped or treeless lands productive, an area larger than Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia combined. But, so far, lands successfully planted to trees make a total area smaller than Rhode Island.

It seems to me one of the most destructive elements of our forests comes from forest fires, and if the governors can in any way educate the individual who owns the forest upon this point of view, this meeting will not have failed. I was visiting the Appalachian country a short time ago and had the pleasure of inspecting the great Biltmore estate. One of the party asked Dr. C. A. Schanck, the forester in charge, if he had \$5,000,000, the interest on which was to be used by him for the preservation of forests, what he would do with it. His answer was, without hesitation, "I would use every dollar of it for a fire patrol." Asked again, if he had the interest on \$20,000,000



what he would do with that, he replied, "I would increase my fire patrol just four times."

Since 1870 forest fires have each year destroyed an average of 50 lives and \$50,000,000 worth of timber. Not less than 50,000,000 acres of forest is burned over yearly.

One-fourth of the standing timber is left, or otherwise lost in logging. The boxing of the longleaf pine for turpentine has destroyed one-fifth of the forests worked. The loss in the mill is from one-third to two-thirds of the timber sawed; the loss in the mill product, through seasoning and fitting for use, is from one-seventh to one-fourth. The damage done by destructive forest insects is enormous and largely preventable. Only 320 feet of lumber are used to each 1,000 feet which stood in the forest.

Nor is the indictment yet complete. By the needless destruction of our forests we impair the value of our streams for navigation, irrigation, water supply, and power. We spend millions of dollars in river and harbor improvements to repair damage which, at the cost of mere thrift and foresight, could have been nearly all avoided. We deal with the effects and ignore the cause. We discuss the exact scientific relation between the forest and the stream, when each year the total quantity of silt carried by our rivers as the result of forest denudation and poor soil management would cover one foot deep a surface of more than 900 square miles. In our blindness we have failed to take advantage of the lessons which the history of other nations contains. Most other countries have learned through bitter experience that forests which are not conserved will be used up, and they are taking care of what they have. We are among the last to learn it.

So much for the indictment. Every clause in it is absolutely true. What would you think of the business capacity and the foresight of an individual against whom such an indictment might justly be read? So much for where we stand. Now let us consider what must be done, and where we might stand if it were done.

These are the things which we must do. They involve no intricate machinery of law or practice. They are simply incontrovertible conclusions based upon the conditions which now exist and which must be remedied: First in importance is the conserving of forests in private lands. Private forest owners, which means 3,000,000 men, and individual forest users, which means everyone, must practice reasonable economy in the woods, in logging, in milling, and in the use of timber. Above all, they must protect their forests from fire. This they can do at an annual cost equal to one-fifth of the damage forest fires do each year, not counting injury to young growth. And it is this young growth which, if preserved, would grow a constant supply of timber for those who come after us. I do not ask of the private owner and user that he apply any economy which is not entirely practicable and which does not mean present as well as permanent profit. I ask only that he protect his forest from fire, that he log it conservatively, and that he plant uplands suited only to forest which have been so denuded of trees that they now fail even to pay the taxes levied upon them. To justify private owners in applying those measures, two main conditions are necessary, both of which exist to-day: The one, a knowledge of the central fact that these measures are needed and that they will pay; the other,

the availability of knowledge as to how these measures may best be applied. If anything I could say to the governors to-day that seems more important than another, it would be to return home to your States and educate the people.

One of the urgent tasks before the States is the immediate passage of tax laws which will enable the private owner to protect and keep productive under forest those lands suitable only for forest growth. In our discussion in committee meeting there was a question raised by a member present as to this recommendation, claiming that it would encourage great monopolies in securing larger holdings of timber, if an annual tax was not required on the timber itself. I have studied this question in foreign lands, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, and I find that the result has been exactly the opposite. It does seem to me that the great monopolies that control vast tracts of our timber land can much better afford to pay an annual tax on their timber than can the individual man, with scanty means at his command, who believes in reforestation and upon whom such a tax would be a burden so great that it would be almost impossible for him to carry it. I believe with all my soul in the tax laws as recommended in our report. It is a shortsighted policy which invites, through excessive taxation, the destruction of the only crop which steep mountain lands will produce profitably. Taxes on forest land should be levied on the crop when cut, not on the basis of a general property tax—that unsound method of taxation long abandoned by every other great nation.

Another urgent task before every great forest State is not only the passage of adequate fire laws, but their actual enforcement. More is needed to protect the forest from fire than a law upon the statute books. It requires the definite commitment of all the States to their inherent responsibility for the protection of the forests within their boundaries from fire, and that entails, and absolutely entails, the employment of a trained force whose first duty is fire patrol. A few days ago I heard a very prominent gentleman from West Virginia testify before the National Conservation Commission that the forest fires of West Virginia alone this year have cost that State in the loss of timber \$5,000,000. A fire patrol that would cost the State of West Virginia \$100,000 would be ample to protect that State against forest fires. Think of it, gentlemen, the loss in this one year in the State of West Virginia was sufficient to patrol that State for its protection against forest fires for fifty long years.

The nation, through the Federal Government, confronts the urgent duty of conserving all, not merely a part, of the public forest lands by use. Until this standing timber is adequately protected and conservatively used, not only as at present on national forests, but on all other public forest lands as well, its very existence is imperiled. Grave injury has already been done. It would be a national disgrace should it continue.

I have recently visited that great and beautiful forest region which lies within the southern Appalachian Mountains, and I have this to say regarding the proposed purchase of a small portion of it by the Federal Government for the permanent use of the whole people. I believe as firmly as I believe that I am standing here on this platform that unless adequate action is taken, and taken soon, the destruction now going rapidly on in the Appalachian Mountains will either

become irretrievable or retrievable only at an expense so vast in time and money that it would stagger this nation. I do not believe that it is necessary or advisable for the Federal Government to acquire all mountain forests in this region, nor half of them, nor a fourth of them. The purchase of one-twentieth of these mountain forest lands, their protection from fire, and their conservation by use would solve, and solve satisfactorily, this grave and urgent problem. But this entails, as every other effective national measure for the preservation of the forest entails, for its success the cooperation of the State concerned, through fire protection, and of the private forest owners concerned, through better handling of forest lands in private ownership.

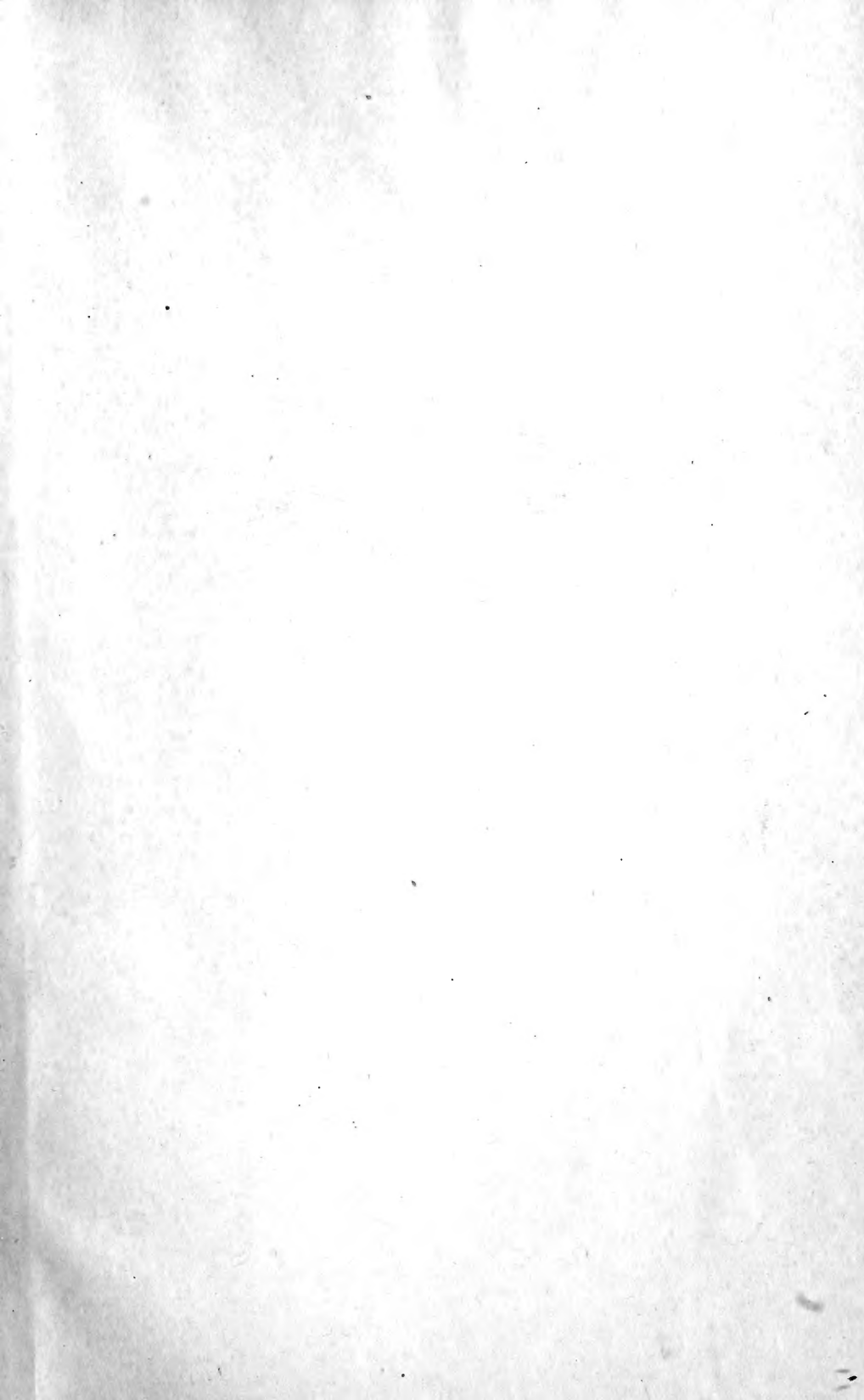
These are the incontrovertible conclusions which flow from the knowledge of how we stand along main lines with relation to the forest. Unless we do these things our forests will inevitably fail, and the failure of our forests means the erosion of soil upon the mountains and a falling off in the usefulness of our streams. Action upon each of these conclusions requires no vast expenditures, no upheaval in present economic conditions, but merely the exercise of reasonable foresight and thrift by individual forest owners and users, by all the States, and by the nation. No one of these great agencies can alone solve our forest problem. They must work together, unitedly, vigorously, adequately, and at once. If they act, together and now, we need not worry greatly about our future timber supply. If they fail to act, it will mean inevitable and grave timber scarcity in the near future, and actual timber famine for those who come after us.

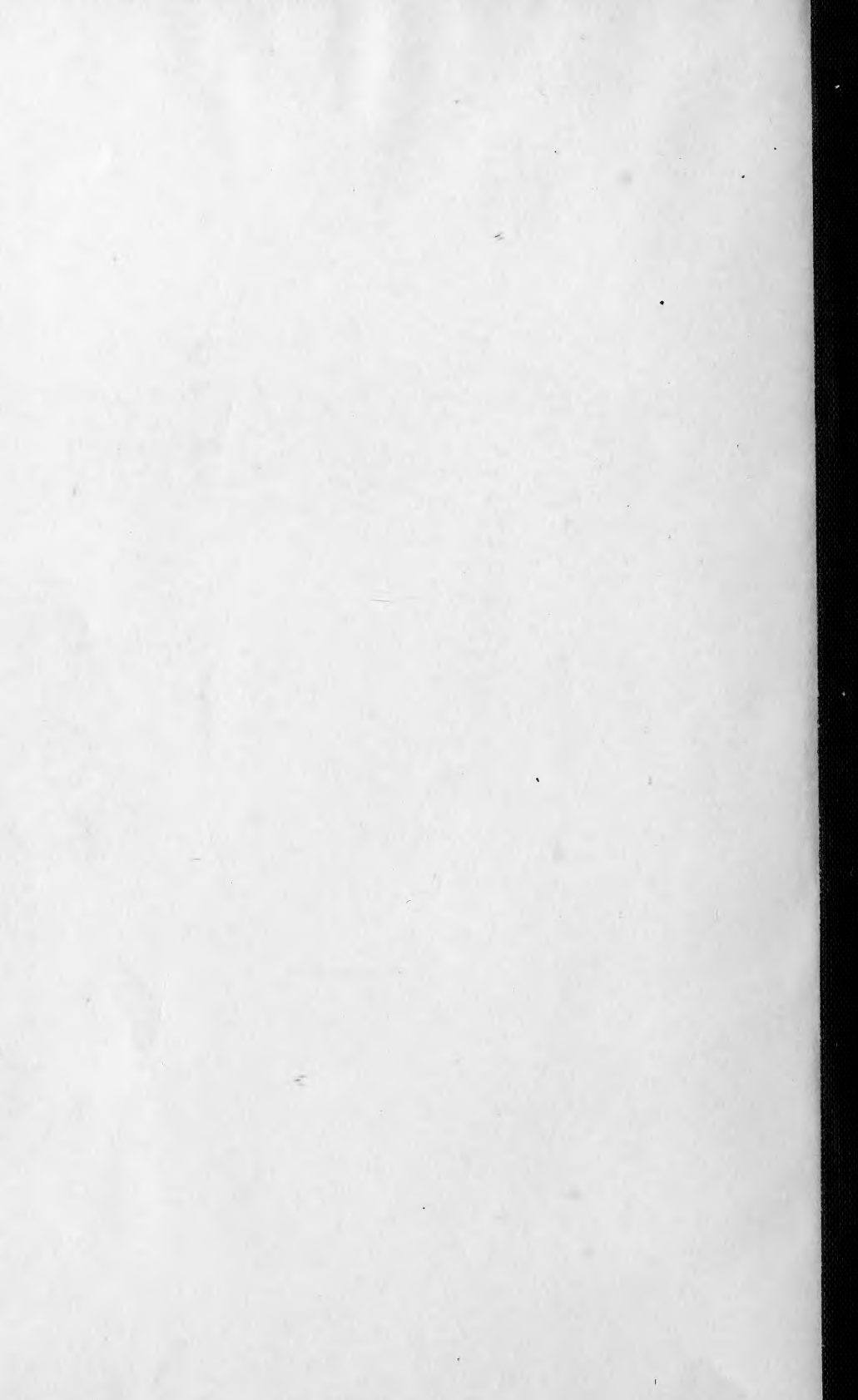
We can no more disregard in our use of the forest than in our use of the mine, of the stream, and of the farm the fundamental truth that want follows close upon the heels of waste. But we should be thankful as individual forest owners and forest users, thankful as individual States, and thankful as a federation of States that the time for the application of an adequate remedy is not wholly past. Grave injury has been done to our country, which can not be repaired in a year, nor a decade, nor wholly effaced in a century; but the fact gained by our present inventory, above all other facts in importance, is that if we act at once we still have forest enough left to produce, under right management, at least what timber we need.

The cause of practical forestry is a just cause. On the one side are established habits of wastefulness and of misuse; on the other side is the doctrine of common sense, of business sagacity, of public duty. Because I believe in the American people, I believe that they will follow the right course and turn away from the wrong in this, as in all other crucial questions, upon which depends the permanent welfare of our country. [Applause.]











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